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The Religious Worldview of Nishida Kitarō

YUSA MICHIKO

THE JAPANESE PHILOSOPHER Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) regarded religion as "the ultimate view of the world and the most important question,"[1] dealing as it does with "the source of life and death."[2] Nishida's interest in the subject grew, he notes (IV: 3–4), during his work on the book *Art and Morality*[3] in the years 1922–1925. He began at that time to consider an epistemology of the religious worldview, outlining his ideas on the matter in his 1923 essay "What is Given Immediately" (IV: 9–37). In 1928 he took up the topic of religious consciousness with his work "The Intelligible World."[4] His first attempt to establish a philosophy of religion was his essay, "Toward a Philosophy of Religion, with the Concept of Pre-established Harmony as Guide,"[5] written in 1944.

This was followed a year later by the final work of Nishida's life,

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* This article is an introduction to the author's translation of Nishida Kitarō's "The Logic of *Topos* and the Religious Worldview" (*Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan*), published in the *Eastern Buddhist* Vol. XIX, No. 2 (Autumn 1986), pp. 1–29, and Vol. XX, No. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 81–119; for the original see *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* (The Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō), vol. XI (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1979 edition), pp. 371–464; hereafter all references to Nishida's collected works will be by Roman numerals designating the volume number, and Arabic numerals designating the page numbers.

[1] Cf. Nishida's letter to Omodaka Hisayuki, March 23, 1945; XIX: 408.

[2] Cf. Nishida's letter to Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, April 12, 1945; XIX: 417.

[3] *Art and Morality*, tr. David Dilworth and V. H. Viglielmo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973), a translation of III: 237–545.

[4] For "The Intelligible World" (V: 123–185) see Robert Shinzinger, tr., *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness* (Honolulu: East West Center Press, 1958).

[5] XI: 114–146; David Dilworth, tr., *Eastern Buddhist* III, 1 (May 1970), pp. 19–46.

"The Logic of *Topos* (*Basho*) and the Religious Worldview,"[6] in which he summarized his philosophical vision and further developed his thought upon the matter of religion. Completed two months before his death, this essay is ranked by many on a par with his first work, *A Study of Good* (1911), one of the earliest and most influential works of modern Japanese philosophy. "The Logic of *Topos* and the Religious Worldview" is imbued with a certain urgency and intensity, due perhaps to some premonition the author may have had of his own imminent death, or to the circumstances under which the essay was composed.[7]

In contrast to thinkers like Schleiermacher, whose humanistic philosophy of religion interprets God as accessible through the medium of human feeling, Nishida argues that God can be faced only in the utter denial of all things human (XIV: 508). Maintaining that existence precedes philosophical reflection, he advances a "logic of '*topos*'," incorporating the reality of the self and the world, as the only logical path capable of doing justice to religious reality (XI: 415–416, 459).

Logic. One of Nishida's lifelong concerns was the logical expression of the Oriental experience, as he indicated in the preface to his collection of essays, *From That which Acts to That which Sees* (1927):

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[6] *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* (1945). For a relatively simple exposition of Nishida's philosophical vision of the world see "The Logical Structure of the Actual World" (XIV: 421–509), the transcript of a series of five lectures given in November and December 1933; its style retains the vividness of the oral presentation.

[7] We learn from Nishida's diary that he began the composition of this essay on February 4th and finished it on April 14th, 1945. At that time the Second World War was entering into its final stage, and major Japanese cities were being heavily bombed. Despite his friends' wish that he move to the countryside for safety, Nishida stayed on at Kamakura near Tokyo and concentrated on writing while the attacks continued. This precarious situation reminded him of "Hegel, who wrote *The Phenomenology of Mind* in Jena under the threat of Napoleon's cannonballs," he wrote to Hisamatsu Shin'ichi on April 12, 1945 (XIX: 417). He felt his life under imminent threat not only because of the war, he seems also to have had a premonition of his approaching death. In retrospect it is symbolic that he took up this essay in the middle of another work, "Life" (*Seimei*) (XI: 289–370), on which he worked from September to December 1944, and which he never finished. He took sick and died suddenly at Kamakura on June 7, 1945.

> It is certainly true that we have much to admire and learn from the glorious development of Western culture which takes form as being and becoming as good; but at the bottom of Oriental culture which has nourished our ancestors for thousands of years, is there not hidden something like "seeing the form of the formless, hearing the voice of the voiceless"? Our heart never ceases to yearn for it. I would like to give a philosophical foundation to such longing. (IV: 6)

In his attempt to do this, he looked first to the relationship between the subject and predicate of a judgement (cf. IV: 189), drawing upon Aristotle's definition of substance (*hypokeimenon*) as "the substratum . . . of which something is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else" (*Metaphysics*, VII, 2; IV: 95). Starting with "The Intelligible World," Nishida adopted from phenomenology the terms 'noesis' and 'noema' to express, respectively, the subjective and objective aspects of consciousness. After his 1934 work *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*, however, he discarded them in favor of the terms 'subject-oriented logic' (*shugoteki ronri*), 'predicate-oriented logic' (*jutsugoteki ronri*), and 'objective logic' (*taishoteki ronri*).[1]

Subject-oriented logic puts the individual, that which exists, in the position of the subject of a judgement (i.e., S is P, as in "the rose is red"), and considers S, the individual, as unique and irreducible. This Aristotelian definition of the individual regards the subject of the judgement *objectively*. Thus, according to Nishida's terminology, subject-oriented logic is synonymous with objective logic in terms of approach.

Predicate-oriented logic, on the other hand, considers any judgement to pertain to the activity of consciousness itself. "S is P" implies that "S is *in* P," for P belongs to the field of self-consciousness and judgement is the activity of self-consciousness (XIII: 366). Plato's view

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[1] Even though what Nishida calls subject-oriented logic emphasizes the aspect of *noema* and predicate-oriented logic that of *noesis*, it seems the presupposition that *noema* and *noesis* stand in the relationship of opposition eventually led Nishida to discard this terminology. Nishida saw *noesis* as always embracing the *noema*. With the terminology of subject- and predicate-oriented logic he hoped to avoid this difficulty. In advocating his dialectical position Nishida maintained that the contradictory self-identity of subject and object is the condition of possibility of any phenomenological discussion (cf. XIV: 445–446; VIII: 4).

of being as that which participates in an idea inclines toward predicate-oriented logic (IX: 383), for it views the individual as partaking in something of the universal.

In sum, subject-oriented logic emphasizes the objective uniqueness of the individual, while predicate-oriented logic emphasizes the individual's universality and subjective awareness.

Nishida's own position is that that which exists in the truest sense is the self-conscious human individual, and that this reality can be grasped by neither subject-oriented nor predicate-oriented logic. It can be understood only through the logic of *topos* (*bashoteki ronri*) (XI: 401–402, 413; XIV: 487). The logic of *topos* involves the contradictory self-identity of subject and predicate (cf. XI: 416), as the human individual is both the self-objectifying predicate and the self-predicating subject of a judgement.[9] Human beings cannot be defined as merely capricious and instinctive (as in subject-oriented logic), nor as simply rational (as in predicate-oriented logic). The logic of *topos* defines the mode of human existence as volitional, self-contradictory, and fundamentally non-rational (XI: 400–402; 434). This both combines and transcends Aristotelian subject-oriented logic, Kantian objective logic, and Hegelian dialectic (IX: 5; cf. XIV: 437). Hegel's dialectic synthesizes subject and object, but in emphasizing the rational Absolute Spirit, Nishida observes, it continues to assume the primacy of the universal over the individual. The latter is left as an abstraction, unfree in the face of the absolute principle (XIV: 438, 501; XI: 399), whereas Nishida claims that his dialectic "renders the individual ever more individual" (XI: 132). The logic of *topos*, dealing with the volitional, self-contradictory and non-rational nature of human existence, is the logical form Nishida believes most capable of illuminating the reality of religion.

Self-Consciousness and Topos. Nishida's philosophy underwent a gradual process of development as he grappled with the nature and modality of self-consciousness (*jikaku*). His thinking in the early phase

[9] Nishida refers to an observation made by Bosanquet that "the subject of the judgement of perception is not a logical subject but that which exists" (IV: 94), and one by Hegel that "judgment is established based on the fact that subject is predicate, individual is universal" (VIII: 371).

might be described in Hegelian and Husserlian terms as a phenomenology of self-consciousness, though Nishida himself claims that his thought "stands at the opposite pole from Hegel's dialectic stance—it is Buddhistic" (XI: 73). He sees himself as heir to the Buddhist tradition for which the mind is the fundamental principle (XI: 86; XIV: 460).

Nishida describes the modality of self-consciousness as "I see myself in myself." This is also the modality of knowing: "I mirror myself in myself" (IV: 215). I know something when my self-consciousness reflects on itself and "in myself." Consciousness, in other words, reflects on itself, *in* the self. Nishida claims that the activity of consciousness is fundamentally that of self-consciousness (XI: 383), which arises by "one's transcending oneself and facing the other" (XI: 378). It arises only in relation to the other *without any ground of its own* (see p. 71, below, and note 13).

It was with the idea of *topos*[10] in his essay of 1926 (IV: 208–289) that Nishida began the systematization of his philosophical worldview. The concept of *topos* occurred to him, he notes, through his criticism of Aristotle's subject-oriented logic (IX: 4). The idea of *topos* may be viewed also as a crystallization of his belief in the priority of experience over individuation, as expressed in the preface to *A Study of Good:* It is not that there is experience because the individual exists; rather, on account of experience the individual exists" (I: 4). The word *topos* (*basho*) came from Plato's discussion of the "receptacle of ideas" (*Timaeus* 50c), Nishida notes, though he cautions that these two concepts are different. *Topos*, he says in a response to Sōda Kiichirō,[11] is "the plane of consciousness which is predicate and not subject" (IV: 315–316). P always embraces S, as S (the object of judgement) is within P (the field of consciousness).

Topos is both the locus in which self-consciousness arises and the

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[10] The word *basho* has been variously rendered as "place," "field," "*topos*," "locus," or simply transliterated as "*basho*." Nishida himself uses the German *Platz*, 'place', and *Feld*, 'field', for *basho* in his fragmentary notes (XIII: 281, 284, 285, 295, 314 ff.).

[11] It was Soda who critiqued Nishida's essay "*Topos*" and also gave his thinking the name *Nishida Tetsugaku*, 'Nishida philosophy', in recognition of its unique achievement (cf. editor's note in IV: 433–434).

locus which emerges simultaneously with, and only in relation to, self-consciousness. This double, interdependent dynamism—the simultaneous arising and mutual determination of self-consciousness and *topos*—is the core feature of this term. The idea of *topos* designates the horizon of consciousness, although it is ontologically prior to it in that this horizon arises within *topos*.

Nishida identifies *topos* with the concrete world of our everyday existence, the world in which we are born, live, and die. It is through the determination of self-consciousness that the self and the world come into being, since "the activity of our consciousness is nothing but the process of our individual self-determination" (XI: 386). Not only do self and consciousness form a coordinate point as two aspects of one and the same reality, but the fact that something occurs, or 'takes place,' in the world implies our becoming aware of this something. (The English expression 'takes place' bears a happy resemblance to Nishida's vision of *topos*, the 'place'.) As self-consciousness and the world give rise to each other, the self and the world co-arise.[12]

In "The Intelligible World" Nishida suggests that three kinds of world—the natural, the conscious (including the world of intellectual awareness), and the intelligible—are distinguishable in terms of the three aspects of self-consciousness: the object of consciousness, the subject of self-consciousness, and the ground of self-consciousness. To these Nishida adds a fourth: the world of pure awareness, in which there is neither seer nor seen (V: 451; cf. V: 177). This is the world grasped by, among others, those who have experienced the *satori* of the Zen tradition, the direct awareness of the groundless ground of self-consciousness.

Topos is the formless seat of being, the *where* of being. Mediated by *topos*, the self and the world stand in "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujunteki jiko doitsu*): the one (the world) and the many (individual people) stand in interrelation and interpenetration. In temporal terms, the world is one; in spatial terms, the world is many, for each individual is a world in himself, and there are as many worlds as there are individuals. The world is both one and many. Moreover, not only is "the one . . . the self-negation of the many and

[12] The Buddhist idea of dependent co-origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*, J. *engi*) may be recalled in this connection.

the many . . . the self-negation of the one" (XIV: 469), but "the one, through its self-negation, is the many, and the many, through their self-negation, are one" (XIV: 483). The world (the one) and individual people (the many) interpenetrate, while each person bears the moments of singularity and plurality simultaneously. (For this point see pp. 69–70, below.)

The Dialectical Vision of the World and the Self. This world of absolutely contradictory self-identity is "historical," not in the sense that it is based on past events but in the sense that it is history-making, as the world is formed and developed by the actions of each individual (XIV: 435–436). The historical world is the world of human beings as *persons* (*jinkaku*), interrelating and interreacting (XIV: 247). A person is born into this world as that which is created, yet becomes that which creates. The created being, in other words, gives rise to a creating being: the created creates. "Person is *creata et creans*" (XI: 130, 144). For Nishida, the idea of person is intrinsically one with the idea of creativity and creation.

In this fashion, the person shapes the world as its constitutive, creative element. Creativity is the mobilizing factor of the historical world which moves "from that which is created to that which creates (*tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono e*)." In this dynamic process, however, the world maintains its self-identity, and therein Nishida sees an aspect of the relationship between God and the world (XIV: 506–507), or of the trinitarian relationship of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (XI: 403). The Father is the World; the Son, the person; and the Holy Spirit, creativity.

Nishida's vision of the one and the many can be explained in terms of a fourfold relationship among the self and the world, and the one and the many (*see chart below*). Under aspect (a), "the self and the one," the self is a self-conscious, singular "I," distinct, unique, and irreplaceable. Under aspect (b), "the self and the many," this I exists in relation to other I's, opposing and yet interrelating. When we shift focus and consider aspect (c), "the world and the one," each of the self-conscious selves is a microcosm that mirrors the entire world. Under aspect (d), "the world and the many," numerous individual worlds act as focal points to constitute the world as a whole.

The Self as a Self-World Continuum

Though these four aspects can be conceptualized in this way, they are in reality one. The self, for example, is simultaneously all aspects of this fourfold mode of existence at any given moment. It is a perspective of the world, and yet it gives shape to the world through its activities. Nishida often compares this vision of the world and the self to the "infinite sphere" (*sphaera infinita*) whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere—a metaphor of God mentioned by Nicholas of Cusa, Pascal, and others, but whose origin may data back to the Gnostics. Each individual self, a microcosm (XI: 385), is one of the infinite number of centers of this infinite sphere (XI: 430), and God is *the* center, giving order to the entirety (XI: 379, 406, 423).

The Absolute Present. Self-consciousness partakes of the very nature and modality of the present. Nishida points out the radically "present" nature of consciousness: the arising of self-consciousness always occurs in the present, or rather, when self-consciousness arises, that moment is always the present (XIV: 232). In this way, "The present is the center of the self. I exist at the present; the present is where I exist" (XIV: 353). The present is the locus of *topos*, of self-awareness.

The present is the point at which the temporal and spatial axes intercept, for the present moment encompasses both time (things have a past history and are open to the future) and space (things co-exist in the spatial dimension). The present moment thus embraces time and space, consciousness and matter, subjectivity and objectivity (cf. XIV: 232–249): it is truly dialectical. Nishida is in basic agreement with the ac-

count of time given by Augustine in the eleventh chapter of *The Confessions*, to the effect that the past (memory) and the future (expectation) are immanent in the present. In his earlier works Nishida calls this present, containing the infinite past and future, the "eternal now" or the "ever present eternity" (*nunc aeternum*, J. *eien no ima;* cf. VI: 181–232). Later he uses the term "absolute present" (*zettai genzai;* cf. IX 196–197 *et passim*). That each moment is the determination of the eternal now renders each moment eternal.

The absolute present, being absolutely nothing with no ground of its own, sustains the world through its self-determination (XI: 376, 379). Constantly determining itself into the present moment, it gives birth to the historical world. The world, without any substratum of its own,[13] moves from that which is created to that which creates as the self-determination of the absolute present, of *topos*. Something religious lies at the ground of this historical world, Nishida believes, for otherwise history would be reduced to nature (X: 502). This claim forms the basis of his philosophy of religion (cf. XI: 141). The world derives its fundamental religiousness from its absolutely present nature (XIV: 506–507). "God is the absolute present" (XI: 116), and each of us, as the self-determination of this absolute present, is a unique individual (XI: 144).

Nishida, defining religion as the human demand for eternal life, believes that religious salvation hinges on the realization of this demand (cf. XI: 453–454). Eternal life, which is none other than "the demand of real self-consciousness" (XI: 133), is not attained after death but exists in that very mode of life for which "the now is the absolute present" (XI: 402). This eternal present resonates with the Buddhist intuition that *saṁsāra* (life and death) is *nirvāṇa* (liberation from the cycle of life and death) (XI: 421–422). In the realization and fulfillment

[13] J. *mukiteiteki*. This word has a Mahāyāna counterpart, *apratiṣṭhāna* (see, for example, Vimalakīrti Sūtra 6.6). In the Diamond Sūtra (10c, 14e), this idea appears in the Chinese translation as *wusuozhu* (J. *mushojū*) or *wuzhu* (*mujū*), 'having no dwelling place', which Nishida is fond of quoting (e.g., XI: 423, 430, 431). He also empathizes with the idea of "groundlessness" spoken of by the German mystic Jacob Böhme, who described the will as *Ungrund* (V: 182–183). Groundlessness is the other side of the *immediacy* of experience, and the standpoint of freedom (XI: 450).

of the eternal now the self is free, transcending the causation of the spatio-temporal world (XI: 425).

Nishida's radically presentist vision of the world of the one and many may bring to mind William Blake's poetic intuition:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.
> (*Auguries of Innocence*)

The Logic of Religion: The God-Person Relationship. Nishida defines God as the absolute present, as the historical world, as the *topos* of Absolute Nothing (i.e., groundlessness, substratumlessness), as Absolute Contradictory Self-Identity, or as Absolute Being. Developing his dialectical view of God, Nishida writes that true Absolute Being is simultaneously absolutely nothing and absolutely being (XI: 398). Again, Absolute Being does not simply transcend relative beings, but, through its self-negation, it meets and thoroughly embraces them (XI: 420, 435). God's self-negation is his *raison d'être*—through it he has his existence "in the many, in the numerous real individuals" (XI: 398). It is through self-negation that God is completely present in this world. God's self-negation is precisely the expression of his unconditional love and compassion; in his love, God continually embraces humanity. Nishida, echoing a famous remark by Shinran, writes that God is ready to negate and manifest himself even in the form of a devil if it is necessary to save the wicked (XI: 404–405). He also finds an expression of this divine self-negation in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation (XI: 435–436).

Self-negation is also the way through which human beings relate to God (XI: 396, 411). In self-negation, the self dies to the ego-self and is born to the true self. For the self to transcend itself is for it to return to the root of the self, to realize its "real self" (XI: 423).

This *self-negation*—of God, of the world, of the individual person—is the crux of Nishida's philosophy of religion. The essential moment of *negation* and paradoxical oneness of Being and Nothingness is expressed by what D. T. Suzuki calls the logic of *sokuhi* (cf. XI: 398–399). *Sokuhi* is the equation mediated by negation: "To say that A is A is to

say that A is non-A, therefore A is A.'"[14] Suzuki sees the logic of *sokuhi* as the characteristic form of discourse in the Diamond Sutra, with its frequent statements like: "To say all dharmas are dharmas is to say that all dharmas are not dharmas, therefore they are called dharmas" (17d) (cf. XI: 399). This is one way of expressing the Buddhist experience of "form is emptiness, emptiness as such is form" (*rūpam śūnyatā, śūnyatā eva rūpam*).

God and humanity are always related through their mutual self-negation in Nishida's religious vision, but they are never identical. He notes that neither Buddhism nor his religious view are pantheistic (XI: 132, 428). Pantheism claims that everything shares the nature of God, whereas Nishida asserts that God and man, though bound in a mutual and interdependent relationship, are separated by eternity. He calls this view "panentheistic," i.e., all is in God (XI: 398–399). He holds that the relationship between God and man is characterized by an "inverse correlation" (*gyakutaiō;* cf. XI: 396), fully realized in the person endowed with religio-existential awareness: the more I realize my sinfulness, the more God faces me; the more conscious I am of myself as a singular existence, the more God stands over against me (XI: 449). One detects here not only the influence of Kierkegaard's thought, but also of Shinran's confessional remark, "Amida's Vow was solely made for me, Shinran, alone" (XI: 431, 449). A religious self-understanding—be it the Christian view of the fall of man or the Shin Buddhist view of human beings as deluded and burning with desire—gives living tension to the inversely correlative relationship between God, or Buddha, and humanity. Faith, says Nishida, arises within and out of this relationship, called forth ultimately by the grace of God or Buddha. He qualifies this, however, by observing that "religious faith" is fundamentally different from "subjective belief," for faith stands on the "objective fact" of human spirituality (XI: 418).

In the dialectical world, individuals mutually determine themselves through expression (XI: 389, 439); "expression," according to Nishida, is the "contradictorily self-identical medium" (XI: 442). He attaches great importance to the idea of expression, as it accords with his radically relational and substratumless vision of the world. It also

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[14] "Kongō-kyō no Zen," *Suzuki Daisetz Zenshū*, vol. V (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1968), pp. 363–455, esp. pp. 380–383.

accounts for the irreducibility of persons endowed with individual self-consciousness: Nishida notes that "expression is something objective and yet also subjective in that it conveys a certain meaning to me" (XIV: 490–493), and that "expression can touch, move, and change the person in some way" (XIV: 490–493). As such, "expression is power" (XI: 440). In the world of religion, too, it is solely by means of expression—by "the Word of God (*Logos*) or the Name of Buddha (*myōgō*)—that humanity relates to God (XI: 439–443).

Nishida held that religious reality does not exist outside the world of everyday experience or the "ordinary way of looking at things" (*byōjōtei;* cf. XI: 454).[15] This ordinary outlook or standpoint, says Nishida, is brought about by the self-negation of God, the self-determination of the absolute present. This standpoint, which embraces the self in its "unity of the mind and the body" (*shinjin ichinyo no tachiba;* X: 251, cf. Dogen), is for the self "*the* standpoint of standpoints" (XI: 454), "the most fundamental viewpoint, intrinsic to self-existence. It is the signpost of our life" (IX: 303). Nishida coins the term *byōjōtei* from *byōjōshin*, part of the vocabulary of the Chinese Zen masters Baso (Mazu) and Nansen (Nanquan). In a famous exchange, Joshu (Zhaozhou) asks Nansen, "What is Tao?" Nansen answers, "Ordinary mind (*pingchenxin*, J. *byōjōshin*), that is Tao" (XI: 454).[16] This "everyday mindedness" or "ordinary mind" is in Nishida's language nothing other than the self-determination of the absolute present, the standpoint of total freedom and self-authenticity (XI: 450). It is here that the individual embodies eternal life; it is here that the essential Mahāyāna position of "*saṁsāra* is *nirvāṇa*" is realized (XI: 421). The ordinary standpoint is in itself the *topos*, the locus, of religious reality.

A Theology of the Logic of Topos. Knowing that Nishida engaged in the intense practice of Zen meditation from his late twenties to his early thirties (1897–1903), one might expect that his philosophy of religion

[15] Ueda Shizuteru observes that whereas Nishida's idea of inverse correlation (*gyakutaiō*) designates the religious *relationship* between the Absolute and the self, the idea of the ordinary standpoint (*byōjōtei*) designates the inverse-correlative *mode* of the existence of the self in this religious relationship ("Gyakutaiō to Byōjōtei," *Risō*, January 1978, pp. 41–42).

[16] Cf. The Transmission of the Lamp, 10; Mumonkan, 19.

would be colored by Zen Buddhism. His position can, however, be regarded as universally Mahāyānist. Nishida integrates the insight he gained through the practice of Zen with the Shin ethos he absorbed as a child and never lost. He sees no essential conflict between the Zen path of self-power (*jiriki*) and the Pure Land path of other-power (*tariki*). Rather, he believes they share "the same ground *qua* Mahayana Buddhism" (XI: 411). Nishida is not alone in holding this view. Zen master Bankei (1622–1693), for instance, advocated the unity of the two paths in his recorded sayings, and D. T. Suzuki held that the future of Japanese Buddhism lies in the unity of Zen and Shin Buddhism.

Nishida's correspondence reveals his conviction that "Buddhist philosophy has points that excel Christianity and can contribute to the future of humanity,"[17] and his belief in "the uniqueness and strength of Buddhism over against Christianity."[18] Indeed, he held that the Buddhist spiritual attitude of "inner transcendence" (XI: 461) and its radically relational cosmology are more in accord than the beliefs of Christianity with modern scientific views of the world.

It would, however, be a mistake to regard his philosophical position as a Buddhist apologetics. Not only is Nishida critical of conventional Buddhism (XI: 462), but his philosophical vision inclines toward a universalism. He is intent on uncovering the eternal dimension of religion in each religious tradition he discusses. His intellectual and temperamental bent towards the universal and essential seems to have allowed him to transcend the traditional boundaries of both Buddhism and Christianity, pointing the way to an overcoming of the parochialism often found in both Eastern and Western spirituality. His thinking brings into new focus the matters of wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), faith and grace, Zen intuition and Shin faith, and Buddhist and Christian spirituality.

Nishida's language is markedly theistic, as when he writes, "Without God, there is no religion. God is the fundamental concept of religion" (XI: 372). His discussions of Mahāyāna Buddhism embrace a theistic moment (doing justice to Shin spirituality). It is intriguing and suggestive that he calls his philosophy of religion "a theology (*shingaku*) of the logic of *topos* [which is] neither theism nor deism, neither

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[17] Letter to D. T. Suzuki, May 11, 1945; XIX: 426–427.

[18] Letter to Hisamatsu, April 12, 1945; XIX: 417.

spiritualism nor naturalism. It is historical" (XI: 406). Even though he uses the word theology only once in his entire writings, he can claim (though this is easily misunderstood) to occupy the standpoint of a believer, who affirms the reality of spirituality.

It was perhaps inevitable that Nishida would come to hold this position, convinced as he was of the unity of the mind and the heart, of philosophical pursuit and spiritual inclination. It was his task to explain spiritual reality from a philosophical standpoint (XI: 371). That was not incompatible in his mind, moreover, with the position disclosed in his lecture notes, circa 1911: "One's religious conviction constitutes a factor in philosophy. A philosopher may not necessarily be a believer, but I would imagine he could not be satisfied with a philosophical system which goes against his own emotional and spiritual temperament" (XV: 177). Again, we read, "Profound philosophy necessarily has a religious foundation, and genuine religion necessarily demands philosophy" (XV: 174). These convictions are quintessentially Nishidan.